

# *F.B.I. Recruits Chinese Students in U.S.*

By MATT RICHTEL

The Federal Bureau of Investigation is recruiting Chinese students at American universities to gain insight into what it says is an intensified effort by the Chinese government to obtain militarily useful technologies in the United States, according to law enforcement officials.

A senior F.B.I. official said the program was aimed at students and scholars because they were sometimes tapped by the Chinese government to collect information, particularly in nuclear physics and disciplines that could be used to advance military communications, missile tracking and battlefield command and control.

The effort, which the official said had been going on for six months and entailed paying students from China, comes as the F.B.I. seeks to revitalize its battered reputation as a counterintelligence unit in the aftermath of terrorist attacks.

It reflects the complex, evolving economic relationship between China and the United States, particularly in the area of technology.

China consumes billions of dollars a year in American technology products, and Chinese scholars and entrepreneurs increasingly are the busi-

ness seeing "a more focused, more directed and more prioritized collection effort" to obtain American technology. He said the Chinese were seeking nuclear weapons technology, and advanced military technology to be used for missile systems and electronic warfare.

In a statement responding to questions, the Chinese government said the idea that it was "collecting military, scientific and technological intelligence in the U.S. is sheer fabrication and not worthy of comment."

The two senior F.B.I. officials said most of the tens of thousands of Chinese students and thousands of scholars visiting the United States for conferences and exchanges were not involved in any organized effort to procure technology.

Further, the officials said much of the technology sought by the Chinese government was not necessarily proprietary, but public information of the type that could easily be found at a university library.

There is nothing new to the assertion that Beijing is directing an effort to obtain advanced technology. Some China scholars are skeptical that the effort has intensified, as the F.B.I. contends.

James Mulvenon, a China scholar

"There's a massive Chinese presence in this country," said Nicholas Lardy, a scholar at the Brookings Institution. "To separate those who are here legitimately from those with a government mandate to get a hold of proprietary technology is very difficult."

Richard Bush, also a Brookings Institution scholar, said that he was not familiar with the F.B.I. program, but that the bureau "has not a very good reputation" in terms of counterintelligence, "so one would have to be cautious that this approach is going to be effective."

He added that the F.B.I. would have to worry about Chinese students "being turned" by the Chinese government and the F.B.I. then "being fed bad information."

A scholar who has discussed the program with the F.B.I., speaking on condition of anonymity, said that in the last year "there has been a very strongly renewed effort" by the F.B.I. to monitor and recruit Chinese students. He said it was "part and parcel of the effort" by the F.B.I. and the Immigration and Naturalization Service "to track all foreign students."

But he said that in the case of the Chinese, the F.B.I. was approaching



acts, and Chinese scholars and entrepreneurs increasingly are the business partners of Americans, making it a serious challenge to discern which technology transfers are legitimate and which constitute a national security threat.

Policy experts say the Chinese government wants to acquire more advanced military technology, particularly in communications.

One F.B.I. official involved with the recruiting of students said there were students acting as agents for the Chinese government — or who might be tapped to do so — who could lend insight into the specific technologies being sought.

He said students were being paid for providing information, but would not say how much.

"We're not interested in kids taking history or English 101," said the official, who spoke on condition of anonymity. "We want lists of students in the nuclear physics program."

The official said the F.B.I. was trying to identify people with access to the directives of the Chinese government who "can tell us where they're focusing their efforts."

He added that the F.B.I. field offices were also looking for people who "if they go home, or when they go home, would be in a position to assist us."

A second F.B.I. official, also speaking on condition of anonymity, said the bureau was making the effort in part because the government was

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with the Rand Corporation, said there was no evidence that the Chinese were involved in some new "vacuum cleaner campaign of technology." Still, he and several other scholars said there was value in government efforts to develop intelligence through Chinese students.

"We need to know more about the linkages between the Chinese military, Chinese government and Chinese industry," Mr. Mulvenon said. One way to go about it, he said, "is to actually talk to the people most strongly wooed by this apparatus — by the Chinese industry, government and military."

Mr. Mulvenon said his research indicated that for the 2001-02 school year, 63,211 Chinese students were in American degree programs. They represent 11 percent of all foreign students in the United States.

One challenge for the F.B.I., China scholars said, is finding students who already work for the Chinese government, or may do so, to act as sources of information.

Chinese, the F.B.I. was approaching students in nuclear physics, aerodynamics, engineering related to missiles or space satellites, nanotechnology, and disciplines related to supercomputers and encryption.

He said the F.B.I., in an effort to establish ties with students, had organized meetings with Chinese student groups on some campuses, seeking to recruit translators.

The F.B.I. official involved in recruiting students said those being sought may or may not already be working for the Chinese government or military.

The official said the Chinese military might seek to recruit a student to send over scientific information, sometimes seemingly very basic. The Chinese government will tell the student, "get on the university system and e-mail us everything about widgets," the official said. "It's open-source information," he said, but the student "has still done something."

Henry Tang, the co-chairman of the Committee of 100, a Chinese-American institute in Washington, said that whether to cooperate with the F.B.I. "is the decision of the individual student."

But Mr. Tang, who said he was not familiar with the recruiting program, said he worried about a policy and statements from the F.B.I. that could unfairly cast aspersions on tens of thousands of Chinese students, and Chinese-Americans more generally.